The Awakening and Freedom of Life

A Teaching by Master Jiqun to a Team Supporting Orphans and Children in Need in 2025

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Welcome. The founder of your organization has put forward the aim of "no orphan in this world," a profoundly inspiring resolve. Your sustained commitment to this altruistic work, offering care to many, reflects the essence of the Bodhisattva path—selflessness and compassion in action.

In our time today, everyone lives with turmoil and anxiety, and social and ecological conditions are far from ideal. In this context, to practice the Bodhisattva path is not easy. I once gave a lecture at a forum organized by the Psychology Department of Fudan University titled "Making a Loving Heart More Powerful." Why did this topic arise? Because many who begin charitable work later find their motivation fading.

How can we sustain our motivation and grow stronger the more we do? We must find within ourselves a wellspring of compassion and great love. Without this inner source, we may become like a clay Bodhisattva that cannot even protect itself.

Today, whether in work or in charity, many people seek meaning outside themselves. Yet in a rapidly changing society, the external world is full of uncertainty and often unfolds in ways we never expected. This easily leads to anxiety, depression, or a sense of meaninglessness. That is why finding the right inner orientation is especially important.

I've heard that you have also been studying Buddhist teachings. This is very valuable, because the Dharma can guide us to understand the truth of life, find inner reliance, and cultivate meaning, value, and happiness. It can also strengthen and support our work in charity. In this way, the Dharma shows a key difference in perspective between Eastern wisdom and Western culture.

I. What Is Self-Awakening

Everyone has some basic understanding of self-awareness—such as doing something voluntarily rather than being forced. But from a Buddhist perspective, self-awareness is far more profound; it refers to the awakening of life itself. This idea is not only emphasized in Buddhism. Many in society have also come to recognize its value, and some media have even described "the awakening of life" as the greatest luxury in the world. Luxury represents what is rare and precious. In a time when material goods are abundantly available, what is truly luxurious is not material wealth, but a cultivated and awakened state of mind.

For a large part of our lives, we chase external wealth, only to find that the happiness it brings is very limited. It also keeps raising our threshold of satisfaction, making it increasingly difficult to feel at ease with ourselves. I once said, "Who you are is more important than what you possess." For "who you are" reflects the kind of existence you embody: awakened or deluded, wise or ignorant, pure or confused, selfless or selfish, compassionate or full of hatred.

Buddhist teachings tell us that within every life lies an infinite treasure. The Buddha's greatest contribution to the world is that he revealed every person has the capacity to save and heal themselves. However, other religions believe that humans cannot save themselves and must rely on external gods. In the vast world, among the myriad beings, there are not only ordinary people but also higher-level beings, such as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in Buddhism, sages in Confucianism, and Jesus in Christianity. Although living beings appear very different, where

does the fundamental difference lie? The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* tells us, "The deluded mind is that of an ordinary being; the awakened mind is that of a Buddha." In other words, the difference between an ordinary being and a sage lies only in delusion and enlightenment.

In Buddhism, delusion and awakening are also expressed as ignorance and clarity. Awakening is clarity, where the mind is like a clean mirror, reflecting everything as it is, so that mountains, rivers, and the great earth may all appear within it. With such clarity, we become immediately aware of our thoughts as they arise and of how we interact with others, rather than realizing it only afterward. The Dharma teaches that the mind already possesses this capacity, yet in daily life, we often dwell in ignorance. Because we cannot see clearly, we end up thinking too much, doing too much, and saying too much—all without even realising it.

Buddhism teaches that this is where the difference between ordinary beings and sages arises. Life divides here. If we follow the path of delusion, we enter the world in a state of confusion and leave it the same way. We never truly know who we are, where we came from before birth, where we're going after death, or what the true nature of the world is. We then view the world through the lens of our cognition, assumptions, and attachments. When we try to understand the world, we cling to our own feelings and thoughts, which give rise to unhealthy mental states. These mental states, in turn, drive us to drift through samsara life after life. Conversely, clarity means seeing everything with complete discernment, including the actions that arise from wrong views and the cycles of rebirth they bring about. Under the illumination of a clear mind, we come to see that all of these are merely mental images appearing in the open sky of the mind. As the ancient masters said, "In dreams, there are clearly six realms of existence; after awakening, there is nothing but emptiness."

In fact, mental states such as love and hate, joy and sorrow, are the varying appearances of the mind, formed on the basis of ignorance. Once we open the clarity and the awakening mind, we train the ability to free the mind from delusion and affliction. Awakening is essential, because this is the heart of Buddhist practice: revealing our capacity for self-liberation and self-healing. Whatever path we follow, the purpose remains the same—to guide the mind toward awakening.

II. Freedom and Liberation

The concept of freedom arose during the Renaissance humanistic movement, which advocated individual freedom and emphasized personal value. In Buddhism, a similar idea is expressed as "liberation," and together they form the phrase "freedom and liberation." I once had a dialogue with philosopher Zhou Guoping on "Buddhist Humanism and Western Humanism," where we discussed "individual freedom and personal liberation." Although the two share much in common, how exactly do they differ?

The call for individual freedom emerged because, in the Middle Ages, people longed to break free from the dual oppression of feudal monarchy and religious theocracy. They wanted a world in which human nature could be fully expressed. As long as one did not harm others and remained within the law, one could pursue freedom in whatever way one wished. The Renaissance therefore brought forth a great flourishing in literature, art, and science. Yet it also unleashed the greed, aversion, and ignorance latent in human nature, eventually contributing to two World Wars and increasingly serious environmental, social, and

psychological problems. Thus, while individual freedom removed many social constraints, it also produced significant side effects.

However, in Buddhism, personal liberation is grounded in a thorough understanding of human nature. It identifies what we should relinquish, what we should cultivate, and what we should manifest. Buddhism teaches that human nature contains both sides: in one thought we may awaken like a Buddha, and in the next we may fall into delusion like a demon. Therefore, liberation is intrinsic to life.

The Western concept of freedom emphasizes the social dimension, holding that shackles are imposed by the external environment. As Rousseau stated, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." From a Buddhist perspective, this only tells part of the story. While some shackles may indeed come from society, most arise from the ignorance, karma, and afflictions within our own minds. Without addressing these inner constraints, true freedom is impossible. In this sense, the Buddhist concept of "liberation" complements the Western concept of freedom. After a dialogue with philosopher Zhou Guoping, we concluded that Buddhist teachings can serve as an essential complement to Western philosophy.

III. Why Isn't Life Free

What exactly makes us feel not free in life? Only by identifying these obstacles can we remove them and attain both freedom and liberation. To address this, Western philosophy emphasizes external freedom, focusing on social issues through systems such as the separation of powers, which limit public authority while protecting individual rights. Buddhism, however, focuses more on internal factors. In the following, I will examine this issue from three aspects.

1. How Karma Limits Freedom

Karma refers to actions. In society, people act through various fields, such as industry, agriculture, and commerce. The charity we engage in is also an action, just a wholesome one.

In Buddhism, human actions are classified into three types—physical, verbal, and mental—known as the three karmas of body, speech, and mind. Why have we become the people we are today? For most of us, this happens without our awareness. Many conditions shape us: the influence of our parents in our original family, the impact of cultural heritage and school education, the influence of friends and colleagues in our relationships, and the values embedded in the wider social environment. However, these external factors are not decisive; their impact depends on how we perceive them—whether we accept, reject, or resist them.

Each of us has a way of thinking that determines how we accept or reject information and form our own views. These views, in turn, shape our actions. As mentioned earlier, there are three types of actions: body, speech, and mind. We often assume that only what we say or do counts as action. In reality, our mental actions—our daily thoughts and emotions—also accumulate and play a significant role in shaping our lives.

Everything we say, do, and think forms a kind of code that shapes our personality, following a consistent pattern. For example, when you embrace a certain culture, it influences your way of thinking and your views. These views then give rise to actions, which accumulate over time into habits. As these habits strengthen, they shape your character and, eventually, your

personality, exerting a dominant influence over your life. In Buddhism, this process is known as the power of samsara.

When we talk about samsara, we usually think of past and future lives. In fact, we experience samsara every day through our mental habits and behavior patterns. For instance, if you devote yourself to charity, your compassion keeps you in the cycle of kindness. If you run a business, your constant focus on improving the company keeps you in the cycle of business. If you are in politics, your daily concern with status and power keeps you in the cycle of politics. And if you are an artist, constantly thinking about art keeps you in the cycle of art.

We often act out of attachment, and in doing so, generate even stronger attachment and craving. The more we act, the more we cling, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. Once this cycle takes hold, whether in our habits, way of thinking, or personal interests, it begins to dominate our lives. Within such habitual patterns, we find ourselves no longer truly free. If we extend karma across a longer span of time and space—for instance, to the family into which we are born—we can see that even then, we are not truly free.

It is clear that life unfolds according to certain laws. Whether a person enjoys blessings or faces difficulties is closely linked to their past karma. Although karma can be transformed, until it is, we are not truly free. Even our character and ways of doing things unconsciously control and shape us.

On a broader level, birds can fly in the sky, and fish can live in the water — these abilities are beyond human capacity. Different karmic forces give rise to different forms of life, and within each form, we are not truly free.

2. How Cognition Limits Freedom

The world we see is shaped by our cognitive system. Have you ever tried wearing a virtual reality (VR) headset? When you see a deep chasm before you, even if you know you're standing on solid ground, you may still hesitate to step forward, because your perception takes over.

Our present karmic system functions like a pair of VR headsets. We believe we are seeing a real, objective world, but what we perceive is actually determined by the headsets we wear. These "headsets" are so innate that we have never considered, or even imagined, that the world could appear differently.

The education we received taught us that the world exists exactly as we see and know it — a real and objective reality. Yet modern science suggests that we can directly perceive only about four percent of the universe, while the remaining ninety-six percent lies beyond our perception. This shows how limited our perception truly is. Even many animals have senses far more acute than those of human beings.

Beyond the limits of our senses, our perception is also highly limited. I often say that each of us engages with the world in two ways: through perception and through needs. Our way of perception depends on our views — the views we hold shape the world we perceive. Our needs depend on our preferences. For example, if you enjoy spicy food, chili peppers taste delicious to you; but for someone who can't handle spice, they are something to avoid.

Similarly, some people love sour flavors, some cannot live without meat, while others cannot tolerate any of these tastes at all.

Furthermore, our emotions shape how we perceive the world. When we like someone, even their flaws can appear as virtues; when we dislike them, even their virtues can seem like flaws. We can find a hundred reasons to justify what we like, and just as many to condemn what we dislike. A skilled debater could even turn black into white, or make the dead seem alive.

Clearly, perception arises from our own feelings, making it partial—and sometimes even completely mistaken. Yet we tend to trust our feelings, cling to our perceptions, and regard them as absolutely real. From this, we form many assumptions and expectations. But the world does not exist according to our assumptions, nor does it move in accordance with our will. When reality fails to align with our perceptions, afflictions naturally arise.

When our perception is limited—dull and one-sided—we are not truly free. This lack of freedom reveals itself in two ways. First, we fail to see the impermanent nature of reality. In the past, we lived a slower life, and our minds could remain relatively calm. But in today's rapidly changing world, whatever we try to hold onto seems to slip through our fingers, leaving us anxious, lost, and unable to find a way forward. Second, we fail to answer life's ultimate questions: Who am I? Where did I come from before birth, and where will I go after death? What is the true nature of the world? As a result, many people suffer from a sense of inner emptiness. They find themselves unable to distinguish what is real from unreal, meaningful from meaningless, or to see where the future lies.

3. How Afflictions Obstruct Freedom

We believe we live in a real world, but in reality, we dwell within our own thoughts. Every day, we struggle with what we want or don't want, what we like or dislike, and what we consider valuable or worthless. Love and hate are the two great themes of life, portrayed to their fullest extremes in countless novels and films. As spectators, we may find such stories captivating, but for those bound by lifelong attachment or hatred, they bring nothing but suffering.

The same problem exists in our everyday lives. For example, when we care deeply about something and pursue it desperately, the process can be exhausting; failing to realize it brings suffering, and losing it after gaining brings even more suffering. As long as we cling to such desires, our minds can never be truly free. In fact, before that person or thing entered our life, there was no suffering, nor did we feel that life was incomplete without it. Yet once we become attached, we start to believe that we cannot live without it—that life would lose its meaning. The same applies to hatred. When you hate someone, you make yourself suffer and feel torn apart—yet letting go of that hatred is never easy.

Today, many people live fragmented lives, caught in a constant rush. They have to keep scrolling on their phones, sitting in front of computers, or finding something to stay occupied. Many people only fall asleep when their bodies are completely exhausted. As long as they have a little energy left, they keep busy, thinking that busyness itself is fulfillment. But in fact, this constant busyness is exhausting. I often say that in the future, one of the most important measures of happiness will be a person's ability to let the body and mind rest, and their ability to stop at will.

In addition, negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and insecurity can trap people in suffering—sometimes even making them feel that life is no longer worth living. In fact, whether we can go on living often depends on a single thought. When we are firmly gripped by negative thinking, life may seem utterly meaningless; yet, once we break free from these thoughts, a sense of meaning naturally comes back.

All these afflictions prevent the body and mind from being free. In Buddhism, liberation means freeing ourselves from inner afflictions. Buddhism defines greed, aversion, and ignorance as the Three Poisons. In other words, these three inner viruses give rise to afflictions and fuel the dramas of love and hate. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to help us see reality as it is, so that we no longer chase or sink into the illusions woven by these poisons.

IV. How Can We Attain Freedom?

Our lack of freedom mainly arises from karma, perception, and afflictions. To attain true freedom, we must work on these three aspects.

1. Attaining Freedom Through Karma

In Buddhism, karma is divided into wholesome karma and unwholesome karma, also known as white karma and black karma. "White" signifies purity and flawlessness, guiding life toward light; "black" represents defilement and impurity, leading life toward darkness. The Buddha described four types of life journeys.

1. From darkness to darkness: life remains engulfed in deep ignorance, greed, aversion, and delusion.
2. From darkness to light: human nature contains both dark and light forces. By igniting the lamp of wisdom within, we can dispel the darkness and step into the light.
3. From light to light: through dedicated practice, we enter a state of awakening, and life abides in perpetual light.
4. From light to darkness: even a flicker of light, if not properly nurtured, can be overwhelmed by greed, aversion, and delusion, allowing darkness to reclaim its hold.

Confucius said, "Only the wisest and the most foolish remain unchanged." Most people can rise or fall, for human nature contains both wholesome and unwholesome forces. When we have gained confidence and strength through cultivation, we can move forward with steady resolve. Without a certain level of practice, we can easily slip back into the inertia of samsara and fall once again into ignorance. That is why, on the path of cultivation, we must be diligent and never grow lax.

The essence of cultivation lies in refraining from unwholesome actions and fostering wholesome ones. But why do certain behaviors come to dominate our lives? Because they are repeated again and again. Even a simple movement for an athlete requires countless repetitions to master—after all, "practice makes perfect." The same is true for all our abilities and interests in life; they are shaped through countless repetitions.

Life consists of many mental factors, and the root of all our actions lies in these mental accumulations. In Buddhism, the *Treatise on the Hundred Dharmas* divides the mind into

three categories: ordinary mental states, afflicted mental states, and wholesome mental states. Whether we cultivate a wholesome life or an unwholesome one depends on how clearly we recognize these mental factors. We need to see which ones should be transformed and which ones should be cultivated, because the quality of our lives is shaped by the mental states we choose to foster.

We all know how much money we have and what assets we possess, but do we know the composition of our inner world? Do we really understand which mental factors make up our minds? Can we tell which are wholesome and which are unwholesome? Which mental states, when cultivated, bring lasting joy and well-being, and which mental states give rise to endless trouble and suffering?

In a sense, each of us is the first to experience our own states of mind. If we spend our days caught in anxiety, hatred, or other negative emotions, we will inevitably suffer. On the other hand, if we nurture kindness, warmth, and tolerance, our lives will naturally be filled with joy. And we are not the only ones affected. When we are anxious, those around us can also feel the energy we radiate and may suffer as well. This is why we must refrain from unwholesome states and cultivate wholesome, ethical ones. In doing so, we benefit both ourselves and others. Every effort we make, no matter how small, bears its own fruit.

When it comes to morality, many see it as a social obligation rather than a personal need. They may think, “If others ignore morality while I follow it, I will be at a disadvantage." In fact, morality is like a fine material that determines the quality of life. As mentioned earlier, the quality of life depends on our actions—some wholesome, others unwholesome—just like using good or poor materials. Morality is the refined material that allows life to flourish from one lifetime to the next. Without it, life is built on inferior material, leading only to decline.

In a sense, life itself can be seen as a kind of product. We might ask ourselves: are we ordinary products, or have we been carefully crafted into true masterpieces? Naturally, no one wants to be ordinary, let alone defective—but can we really call ourselves masterpieces? In the world of business, every renowned brand goes through careful design and meticulous production, striving for excellence at every stage. Yet when we consider how we have developed, can we truly say it was the result of careful design? The truth is, it was not. Because our culture provides little guidance in this area, most people grow up unconsciously, becoming scattered and confused in their inner lives.

I once said that many people’s lives are built on piles of wrong views and heaps of confused emotions. Can such a life truly bring happiness? In fact, such a state of life is like a perpetual motion machine, ceaselessly generating suffering for oneself and for others. Buddhism teaches that life is suffering, but this is not absolute. More precisely, it is a life rooted in greed, aversion, and ignorance that gives rise to suffering. A life of awakening, on the other hand, is filled with compassion, joy, and peace. This shows that the mind is the source of both suffering and happiness, while material things are only secondary. When your mind is full of suffering and negative emotions, even if the whole world were yours, you still would not find happiness.

Therefore, we should strive to cultivate a higher-quality state of being. In this way, we can feel at ease wherever we are and be able to resolve whatever we encounter. This is more important than anything else, because it concerns not only our present life but also our endless future lives.

From the perspective of karma, we must approach life in two ways. First, we need to repent for our past mistakes and examine our present state of mind — seeing clearly which of our actions may harm ourselves and others, and sincerely resolving to change them. Only through such honest self-reflection can we stop unwholesome actions and cultivate wholesome ones. Second, we need to develop the wisdom of life. Everyone wants to become a better person, but without wisdom, we often pursue only external forms of goodness—improving our appearance or decorating our surroundings to make them pleasing. These, however, are temporary and impermanent. True and lasting benefit comes from cultivating inner beauty. Even when youth fades and life becomes simple, the mind remains rich and content.

2. Attaining Freedom through Right View

Life has two dimensions: the finite and the infinite. Most of the time, we only see the finite. Sometimes, even a single thought becomes our entire world. However, behind every thought lies the true mind, as vast as space. When we step outside of our thoughts and emotions, we can experience the infinite nature of the true mind.

Building on this, at the level of perception, Buddhism helps us step beyond our immediate feelings and see the true nature of worldly phenomena. To understand the world, physics offers various approaches, such as classical physics, quantum physics, relativity, and string theory. Buddhism, however, teaches the law of dependent origination: all forms of existence, including our physical body, are temporary appearances arising from conditions, with no fixed self-nature. This is how Buddhism apprehends the true nature of all phenomena.

"No fixed self-nature" means that nothing exists on its own or remains unchanged. Instead, everything has infinite possibilities. Based on this, Buddhism teaches that "One is all and all is one," pointing out that even a tiny speck of dust is connected with the entire universe. "No fixed self-nature" aims to counter the wrong view of "fixed self-nature." It is because ordinary beings, clinging to the self and phenomena, perceive all things as if they were independent, objective, real, and unchanging.

In fact, both philosophy and science have supported this view of "no fixed self-nature" to some extent. For example, Early Indian philosophy held that the paramanu—the ultimate particle—was real, indivisible, and the smallest element of the universe. Classical physics also held that phenomena were not real, yet the basic particles making up phenomena were real, thus creating the universe. However, quantum mechanics has revealed the wave-particle duality, showing that matter does not exist in any fixed form as either wave or particle. What kind of world we see is also shaped by our personal perception. Regarding the world we see, we are not merely observers but also active participants. Some may ask, "If that's the case, why do we all seem to see the same things?" It is because we are like users wearing the same VR headset, running the same program. If we were to switch to the VR system of a cat or a dog, we would enter their world instead.

In the phenomenal world, we tend to develop two types of attachments: attachment to the self and attachment to phenomena. From these attachments arises a dualistic world, such as beauty and ugliness, good and evil, self and other. This duality can give rise to opposition and reinforce attachment. When we cling to duality, we become trapped in it and lose our freedom. In fact, all Buddhist practices are to help us break free from dualistic opposition. It is

like a sky covered with dark clouds: when we live within the clouds, we are surrounded by darkness, unable to see the truth of the world. Only by letting go of attachment can we break through the clouds and return to our original mind, as vast as the sky.

When you reach this state of mind, all phenomena in the world appear like a dream or an illusion. Just as the *Diamond Sutra*, cherished by literati and scholars for centuries, teaches us, "All conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, like dewdrops and a flash of lightning. They should be seen as such." With this insight, no matter what pressure or adversity we face, we understand that they are only temporary phenomena — arising and passing away through conditions. Actually, all our anxiety and attachment come from the belief that the world has a fixed self-nature. When we realize that these views are nothing more than dreams and illusions, their impact on us diminishes, and we can experience true freedom.

The mind itself possesses the ability to liberate itself, but it loses this freedom when it becomes entangled in phenomena. This is why the Eightfold Path begins with Right View. In other words, we need to cultivate right views, including impermanence, no-self, the mind-only teaching, and the Madhyamaka insight. With the Right View, we can unlock wisdom and see the truth of the world. If our views do not align with the truth of the world, we will experience afflictions. As the saying goes: "Compassion has no enemies, and wisdom gives rise to no afflictions." This is exactly what the teaching means.

When studying Buddhism, we need to learn to view the world and life from a higher dimension. The reason we lack true freedom is that we hold wrong views and cling to them. By breaking free from these wrong views, we can attain freedom. This freedom, however, is not confined to rational thought; it goes beyond rationality, allowing us to unlock the infinite wisdom within. Only then can we come to understand the truth of the world.

3. Attaining Freedom by Overcoming Afflictions

How can we address the lack of freedom caused by afflictions? There are mainly two methods.

The first step is to work on our perception, as many afflictions arise from the way we see and interpret things. Changing our perception can resolve many coarse afflictions. However, some subtle, deep-rooted afflictions remain. To address these, we cultivate awareness through meditation, unlocking the mind's capacity for self-awakening.

There are many ways to practice meditation. What we promote is Right Mindfulness Meditation, as taught in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. This approach is easy to start and highly practical. Our mindfulness meditation system has three levels—beginner, intermediate, and advanced—starting with mindfulness and gradually leading to the original mind of no-thought.

To practice mindfulness, we cultivate two key abilities: concentration and awareness. The first step is learning to focus—for example, in meditation, using the breath as an anchor for the mind. But concentration alone is not enough. Many successful people have strong focus, yet it often comes with attachment. This attachment can give rise to anxiety, negative emotions, or dependence on achievement. Once we become attached, we fear setbacks and failures, and become overly concerned with gains and losses.

Concentration is only the foundation; cultivating awareness is even more important. While fully engaged in an activity, the mind can remain clear and lucid, like a mirror reflecting everything without attachment. This clarity is an inherent quality of the mind, and our task is to awaken it. By doing so, we can stay focused yet maintain a sense of detachment, fully aware of both our actions and mental states. When the mind rests in awareness, it naturally keeps a healthy distance, free from attachment and negative emotions.

Ordinary beings, out of ignorance, constantly generate afflictions and emotions. Once we awaken awareness and open the mind's inner clarity, we gain the ability to dissolve these emotions and afflictions. This capacity must be cultivated through ongoing meditation practice. In recent years, mindfulness has gained worldwide popularity and is applied in fields such as psychology, education, and healthcare, effectively helping people address mental challenges. Yet in these contexts, mindfulness is often treated as a mere technique, offering only temporary relief. It lacks the profound wisdom of Buddhism and a holistic understanding of life and the world. Buddhist mindfulness meditation, in contrast, helps us realize our original mind, unlock inner treasures, and attain ultimate liberation. This practice must be guided by Right View; without it, our understanding of mindfulness—and the benefits it brings—will remain limited.

Mindfulness is the most direct key to awakening. Once it is unlocked, life can attain freedom and liberation. This doesn't mean that all afflictions and habitual tendencies vanish immediately. Cultivation still requires consistent effort over time. As the Buddhist saying goes, "Awakening may be sudden, but cultivation must be gradual." Practice is not limited to seated meditation; it extends into daily life, where we face real challenges. Our afflictions are deeply rooted, accumulated over countless lifetimes. That is why Buddhism emphasizes not only "seeing the path" but also "walking the path." By observing our reactions in each encounter—seeing whether we are influenced or carried away—we gradually dissolve afflictions. Through repeated mindful effort, we can ultimately achieve complete liberation and great freedom.

To sum up, we have explored how life can progress from delusion to awakening, and from bondage to true freedom, through three aspects: karma, perception, and the letting go of afflictions.

V. Q&A

Q: In studying Buddhism, I understand the teachings to some extent. But during meditation, I often face the problem of "knowing but not doing." In practice, my own desires feel very strong. For example, I get lazy and find myself lying in bed, unwilling to get up. How should I deal with this?

A: What can we do? Practice is never easy, especially in our era, which Buddhism calls the Age of Dharma Decline. Why is it called that? Because temptations surround us, and the world constantly pulls us toward greed, aversion, and ignorance. This makes practice particularly challenging today.

To help everyone study and practice effectively, I once highlighted two key points: a supportive atmosphere and effective guidance. By "atmosphere," I mean a group of people—say five, ten, or fifteen—who meet weekly to study, share, volunteer, or do charity work.

Human laziness is strong, and social temptations are many; without such an environment, it is very difficult to maintain self-discipline. Equally important is effective guidance. This allows us to see our growth on the path of practice, as mindfulness strengthens and afflictions gradually weaken. Both elements are indispensable. A supportive atmosphere without progress or gain will not sustain motivation. Effective guidance without a supportive environment makes consistent practice difficult to maintain.

Q: I have a 14-year-old boy. Sometimes when my expectations are too high, I end up feeling very stressed, and he becomes stressed as well. But when I relax my expectations and let things flow, I worry that he is becoming too loose. Then I feel I haven't done my duty as a parent and start regretting it. I can't seem to find the right balance. What should I do?

A: When educating children, it is not about imposing demands but guiding them through the right environment. If you rely only on demands—whether too high or too low—they will not work. If you hope your child will grow into a certain kind of person, you should create an environment that naturally supports that direction. In such an atmosphere, the child will grow that way without even noticing. Otherwise, children simply cannot manage themselves. And even as parents, can you truly control yourselves and live up to all your own expectations? Of course not. So how could we expect children to control themselves?

Chinese culture emphasizes self-cultivation and family harmony, so it is important for families to nurture an atmosphere where culture can be passed on. One way is to create a Dhyana Tea Space at home, where the family can gather each week to drink tea, read, practice with the mindfulness ball, care for one another's well-being, and prepare vegetarian meals. You can also invite relatives, friends, classmates, and colleagues to join. Today, many people stay out of touch until they need something, which feels transactional. But if we can build a warm and altruistic environment where people come together simply to learn culture and cultivate body and mind, I believe children will naturally receive positive influence through what they see and experience.

Today, schools and society offer almost no education about life itself, so families must fill this gap to ensure children's physical and mental well-being. Whether for personal growth or for family relationships, genuine connection is essential. Yet many people now live inside their own perceptions; even between spouses or between parents and children, heartfelt connection is often lacking. People are connected to their phones, but not to one another. Our "Dhyana Tea Space" initiative is meant to help restore this kind of meaningful connection.

Q: Master, you said we should slow down. But for a child in the final year of junior high, the academic load is very heavy. If they slow down, it feels as if they will fall behind, so I can't help feeling anxious about it.

A: What matters most is a child's physical and mental well-being. In my talk on "Bringing Buddhist Teachings to Family Education," I pointed out that many parents focus only on grades and skills, while overlooking their child's character and overall health. Only when problems eventually arise do they regret not having paid attention sooner.

The key point I am making is not about slowing down. It is about creating an environment that supports healthy communication between parents and children, so that children can be guided toward a healthier way of living. This does not hinder their studies; it can actually help them.

In the age of artificial intelligence, simply accumulating knowledge no longer holds the same value. Even if you studied for a hundred years, AI could learn the same material in a second. For the future, what truly matters are creativity and mental well-being. These two qualities will be more important than ever.

Q: I became a "Hand in Hand" volunteer five years ago. In my work, I've seen families where two or even three children fall under our care. Some have lost their parents, while others have parents living with disabilities or mental illness. The more difficult the situation, the more care we try to give, yet progress remains very slow. Now that we have the good fortune to encounter Dharma and understand karma, I would like to ask: Master, how can we effectively support these families and help them move toward a better direction in life?

A: Changing a person is never easy. This is true not only for children facing hardship; even in well-off families, parents often worry about their children and may even find the household in turmoil. This shows that the problem is widespread across society. In traditional Chinese culture, from Confucian teachings on learning to become a virtuous person to Buddhist practices of cultivating body and mind, there have long been clear standards and methods for personal development. Yet today many people grow up without such guidance, developing in a kind of wild, unguided way.

What you are doing is learning to walk the path of a bodhisattva. This calls for great patience and skillful means. You already have valuable experience, so keep reviewing it, refining it, and sharing it with one another. The environment is equally important. Create a space that is warm, kind, and altruistic. The children you serve lack consistent care, so love must come first. Only in such an atmosphere can you genuinely influence and support them, guiding them in how to live and how to act. As for learning traditional culture, we have many programs available. You are welcome to come learn with us and experience them in the future.